



STEPS IN PROBLEM SOLVING

There likely will be many challenges or problems you and your family may face before, during and after cancer treatment. Having a “recipe” or method for solving these challenges can reduce the pressure for you. It’s like any other skill, the more you practice, the more naturally you will start do use this any time you identify a challenge.

You can use this “recipe” on your own or get feedback from others. Many people like to write when they are working through the steps (We’ve also included a sample worksheet if you aren’t sure how this process can work!)

1. Define the problem. Create one clear statement that describes the problem briefly and clearly.
2. Recognize how you feel about the problem.
3. Consider all possible solutions. Brainstorm.
4. Try to imagine how other people you know might solve the problem or ask them to brainstorm with you.
5. Evaluate the ‘pros and cons’ of each solution. (Remember, “Do nothing” is always a solution).
6. Make a list of the solutions you created. Identify the least practical, and the most desirable one and finish with the solution you feel is the best.
7. Make a choice and do it.
8. Review and re-do if necessary.



Problem Solving Sample Worksheet

An Example of Problem Solving Using the Steps

Step 1: What is the one problem to be solved now?

I'm going back to work. How will I handle all the questions?

Step 2: How do I feel about it?

I am worried that I will break down. There are some people at work I don't want to talk to about it. I feel embarrassed that people will want to treat me differently than before. I am worried some people will try to avoid me.

Step 3: Think of solutions.

I can talk with a friend I know who returned to work after cancer treatment. I'll ask her how she handled it.

I can ask a co-worker to let everyone know that if I want to talk about it, I'll bring it up.

I can chose to not go back to work.

I can try and anticipate questions and think up answers in advance.

Step 4: Imagine what others would do.

My husband would joke about it.

My mother would say, "It's none of your business!"

My friend would become depressed and pity herself.

My other friend would make up an email that explains what happened and how others can help support her.

Step 5: Make a list of the pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages) of the solutions in Steps 4 and 5.

Talk with a friend I know who returned to work after cancer treatment. Ask her how she handled it.

She's been through it and can tell me what might happen. But... it might be hard for her to talk about what she went through again.

Anticipate questions and think up answers in advance.

I'll feel more in control. I'll be able to think up some answers ahead of time. But, this takes a lot of energy. They may ask things I didn't think of in advance.

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Ask a co-worker to let everyone know that if I want to talk about it, I'll bring it up.

I'll feel protected and secure. But, that's a lot to expect my friend to do. Also, I need people to reach out to me when I am feeling low and they might think they can't do that.

Not go back to work.

I can gather my strength longer and continue to heal. But, I feel isolated already. And there are financial pressures for my family when I'm not working.

Joke about it.

Joking relaxes some people and will help them know I'm still me. But, some days I won't feel like joking and I will want to talk to someone then too.

Write an email.

I can take time to really put down what I want to say. There might be less questions. But, I'll have to share the information with everyone so that people don't feel I ignored them or excluded them. Some people might not read the email.

Step 6: Rank the solutions from least workable to best.

Not go back to work.

Joke.

Anticipate questions and prepare answers in advance.

Meet someone with the same experience.

Ask a co-worker to let everyone know I'll tell them what I want them to know.

Write an email.

Step 7: Make a decision. Write it here.

I decided to write an email the week before I return to work. That way, they have to time to prepare and I have time to think about what I want to tell them. People who feel uncomfortable can chose to read as much of the email as they want.

Step 8: Review and re-do if necessary. Look for a positive aspect of the original problem.

I got some really supportive emails back even before I returned. It made going in the first day a lot easier.